



Western Hamilton County Collaborative Plan

Executive Summary

A Concise Overview of the
Planning Process and Plan:

The Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission

March 11, 1999

INTRODUCTION

This summary provides a brief overview of the Western Hamilton County Collaborative Plan. It provides the reader with a broad understanding of what is included in the Plan, its underlying themes and its main facets and recommendations. The reader who seeks more detailed information should consult the main document, which is available from the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission, area libraries, and for purchase through various copy shops. Both the Plan and this summary are available on the internet at www.hamilton-co.org/hcrpc/.

WESTERN HAMILTON COUNTY

For the purposes of the Collaborative Plan, Western Hamilton County is comprised of ten jurisdictions: the six townships of Colerain, Crosby, Green, Harrison, Miami, and Whitewater; the Villages of Addyston, Cleves, and North Bend; and the City of Harrison. The study area is nearly 160 square miles or approximately 102,000 acres and had a 1996 Census estimated population of 146,678 people.

WHY PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF WESTERN HAMILTON COUNTY?

Approximately 40 percent of Western Hamilton County is currently undeveloped. The Western Hamilton County planning effort was undertaken to be proactive and to try to direct the manner in which growth will occur in the future rather than just let things happen and continue current trends or “business-as-usual.” Without this regional planning approach, development in the next 20 years could “use up” most developable lands, the area’s rural character may disappear, growth may continue to be random and haphazard with a resulting increase in infrastructure costs, and key environmentally sensitive areas will be lost.

WHO DEVELOPED THE PLAN?

The Plan is the culmination of a three-year effort to solicit and incorporate ideas from the ten jurisdictions, four school districts, and the many citizens, agencies, and organizations that have an interest in the future of Western Hamilton County. It is a plan that seeks to balance the desires of these different groups.

The planning framework included a number of different public involvement avenues such as committees, task forces, public meetings and workshops, newsletters, and even an art competition in the area’s schools to get the young people involved with envisioning the future of their community. In addition to the public at-large, the four main groups that helped develop and guide the plan are briefly described on the next page.

Collaborative Planning Committee (CPC)

A 32-member committee was formed with appointees from each participating jurisdiction, representatives from school districts, business, and environmental organizations. This group worked with the County staff and consultants to develop the Plan for the future development of the western portion of Hamilton County. They provided their recommendations to the Plan Steering Committee.

Task Forces

To get as many people actively involvement in the planning process as possible, Task Forces were formed to assist with the plan making. CPC members and interested citizens participated in the following Task Force groups:

- Housing and Schools
- Infrastructure and Services
- Economic Development
- Community Character and Environment

The Task Forces identified preliminary issues and areas of focus to be addressed by the planning effort. These were used to inform the planning process.

Technical Support Committee

This small group of county and agency staff members provided technical guidance in all phases of the Plan's development.

Steering Committee

This group is comprised of the elected officials from each jurisdiction, as well as the Board of County Commissioners (chairperson), two members of the Ohio legislature, the County Engineer, a representative from the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission, and a representative from the Western Economic Council. The Steering Committee met throughout the process to review the CPC, staff and consultant work and solicit and review comments from the public. This is the group that agreed upon and approved the Plan's recommendations.

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process has sought to ask and answer a series of questions. Where are we now? Where are we going? What do we value? Where do we want to go? What do we measure?

Where are we now?

About one-quarter of Western Hamilton County's (WHC) 160 square miles is being used for agriculture; single family homes make up almost a third, and the remainder is split between commercial/ industrial and public/semi-public uses; slightly more than a tenth is vacant. Most development in the County is regulated by zoning ordinances, with the exceptions of all of Whitewater Township and one precinct of Miami Township.

Western Hamilton County is largely undeveloped, of course, because it does not have extensive public sewer and water service. Since the soils, for the most part, do not support septic systems and since well water yields and quality are uneven, there has been significant pressure to bring public sewer and water to the west.

A limited network of roads mirrors the sparsely developed landscape for WHC. Compared to the developed portions of Colerain and Green Townships, there is relatively little congestion on rural WHC roads today, even though residents perceive recent increases in traffic as significant. The low density of WHC cannot support any significant transit service or usage. Eighty-four percent of Western Hamilton County's workers, therefore, drive to work alone.

The expansive floodplains of the Whitewater and Great Miami Rivers divide Western Hamilton County into three distinct areas: to the east, the flat plateaus of Colerain and Green Townships crease into steep valleys as they move towards the Great Miami River. Between the rivers, the northern stretches of Harrison and Crosby Townships are relatively flat and have the best farming soils in the area; to the west of the Whitewater River, Whitewater and Harrison Townships are characterized by steep slopes; the City of Harrison occupies the flattest area in the northwest. Given this rugged terrain, roads have taken the path of least resistance; they follow the valley floors, run up along side streams or keep to the high ground.

Not surprisingly, the scenic value of this landscape is viewed by residents as a treasured asset; scenic hillsides are concentrated west of the Great Miami but one very high quality area is also located just east of the river in northern Colerain Township. Large regional parks preserve about 4,500 acres of these lands. The Great Miami Buried Valley Aquifer System, one of North America's most extensive, underlies WHC. The area's hydrogeology makes this aquifer very vulnerable to pollution.

Where are we going?

The planning process included a projection of existing trends to see what would happen if no changes were made and development continued "as usual." This effort showed that there would be substantial traffic congestion, erosion of the rural character and that almost all lands would be developed. This was used to focus the communities' attention on what was desirable for the future and on what changes were necessary to implement a desired future.

What do we value?

Community values were solicited through a series of community meetings and through SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analyses with citizen workshop participants, the Collaborative Planning Commission and the Steering Committee. The results were used to inform the planning effort and to identify the main issues and values that the Plan would address and reaffirm.

Issues and Values

During the early phases of the planning process, Western Hamilton County residents were asked to identify community issues and express community values. Some of the basic issues or challenges identified by residents of Western Hamilton County as part of this planning process are summarized on the following page:

Issues and Challenges:

- Having local control over land use and annexation issues
- Beautification
- Planning and growth management
- Preservation of small town or rural character
- Importance of expanding water and sewer service
- Expansion of employment
- Development of more parks and recreational opportunities

Clearly inherent in the above list is the tension between a desire for local control and the expressed need for area-wide planning to implement growth management. It also highlights the tension between the desire for expansion of sewer and water service in some areas and the desire to manage growth and preserve rural character in others. These issues and values were used to create a vision for the future of Western Hamilton County.

Where do we want to go?

A Vision for 2020

Western Hamilton County in 2020 will be a place that:

- Retains its rural character and protects its environmental features.
- Preserves its historic landmarks.
- Expands water and sewer service to areas planned for public sewer and water and in support of the WHCCP future Land Use Plan.
- Has mostly low density, single-family residential detached homes with a mixture of other housing types.
- Phases growth with planned infrastructure improvements.
- Maximizes economic development opportunities.
- Manages the appearance of the built environment.

It will also be a place where:

- The various jurisdictions within Western Hamilton County work together to encourage responsible development for the benefit of the area as a whole, using the WHCCP as a guide to decision making.
- Job growth occurs in tandem with residential development.
- Existing roads/intersections are improved and new roads are built to serve the growing residential and non-residential populations.
- Rural roads and views from them are preserved.
- Political leadership on growth management is evident.

Alternative Scenarios

In addition to the vision statement, the planning process included the development and analysis of four alternative development scenarios. Subsequently, a preferred scenario was developed and combined facets from several of the alternatives.

Four alternative scenarios were identified and defined as a result of several public workshops and numerous discussions among the Regional Planning Commission staff and their consultants. The four alternatives analyzed were developed as a tool to help the Collaborative Planning Committee, Steering Committee, and community at-large determine the most desirable future for Western Hamilton County. The alternatives analysis process focused on future land use patterns and the allocation of various population, housing and employment projections. Alternative land use scenarios were tested to determine the range of their potential impacts and to make explicit what the various policy trade-offs are among a variety of values which may, in fact, conflict with each other.

Four alternatives depicting possible land use patterns were developed and analyzed:

- #1 – Low Growth with Limited Water/Sewer Investment
- #2 – Moderate Growth with Limited Water/Sewer Investment
- #3 – Maximum Growth with Substantial Water/Sewer Investment and Ohio River Bridge
- #4 – Trend (continuation of current Trends)

Scenario #1: This scenario sought to retain the west side's rural character while permitting growth to occur. It sought to preserve these rural features, particularly west of the Great Miami River. The areas east of the river were assumed to develop at more suburban densities so as to preserve the western areas while still providing for growth. This scenario also sought to preserve key areas of prime farmland. It promoted land use patterns and infrastructure investment decisions that conserve the natural environment.

Scenario #2: This scenario had contiguous, compact development as its key policy which would enable protection of key environmentally sensitive areas. As such, new residential development would be an extension of existing development rather than opening up new areas through leapfrogging. This scenario was based on the assumption that such leapfrogging is too expensive in terms of sewer, water and roads and would impose additional travel and air pollution burdens.

Scenario #3: This scenario assumed that the individual jurisdictions and the County would aggressively pursue economic development in the form of business development. It assumes that the amount of land use regulation is limited to that necessary for health and safety protection and not to constrain the market to meet other goals such as environmental protection, preserving rural character, managing the location and timing of growth, etc.

Scenario #4: This scenario is the continuation of the current trends alternative. It is the "do nothing differently than today" approach. It continues policies that encourage the development of open lands, the minimal coordination of development and infrastructure planning and lack of a more regional approach to planning.

Preferred Scenario Defined

After the review of the alternative scenarios and following input from community meetings held in August 1998, the Collaborative Planning Committee, Steering Committee, staff, and consultants developed a Preferred Alternative. It combined several facets of the previously defined alternatives into a “balanced” scenario that was acceptable to the Steering Committee representatives of component jurisdictions. Following input from the public at a January 1999 hearing, the Steering Committee made modifications to the Plan and unanimously approved it on February 3, 1999.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

Map 1 shows the recommended future land use for Western Hamilton County. Table 1 shows the planned land use categories and associated densities and assumptions.

Table 1: Future Land Use Categories

Land Use	Maximum Development Density/Intensity	Percent of Land for Employment & Service Uses	Description
Residential Very Low	1 dwelling /3 acres	1%	Large lot residential uses in rural setting; typically not served by public water/sewer
Residential Low	1 dwelling/acre	1%	Single-family residential typically served by public water and sewer
Residential Infill	2 dwellings/acre 0.3 FAR (floor area ratio)	6%	Predominantly single-family lots; however some other dwelling types such as duplexes, townhouses, and apartments; assumes 75/25% split between SF & MF units
Residential Moderate	4 dwellings/acre	1%	A mix of dwelling unit types
Employment	0.3 FAR (floor area ratio)	100%	A wide range of employment development (e.g., office, retail service, and industrial)
Employment Holding Area	X	100% (may have interim uses)	These were identified during the planning process as prime employment sites but are outside planned water & sewer service areas. They represent long-term economic development opportunities.

Land Use Rationale

The Plan’s Future Land Use categories and the location of these recommended land uses are based on an analysis of the carrying capacity of the land, the projected growth for this portion of the County, the fiscal and transportation impacts of various levels of development, and the desire to balance future development with the preservation of the area’s rural character.

The Plan thus recommends more development be concentrated in areas planned to be serviced by public water and sewer. The Plan seeks to provide a vision for the future development of Western Hamilton County that will in turn guide decisions about infrastructure investment and road improvements rather than to allow the decisions about infrastructure to guide where development occurs as is currently the case.

The land use categories in this Plan are somewhat more general than those that may be currently used in other area plans or development ordinances. The intent is to provide a general framework that is flexible enough to be implemented at the local level but that provides enough guidance to present a cohesive vision for the region as a whole. Detailed parcel by parcel planning at the local level is an activity that is anticipated to be guided by the Plan and to occur as part of the implementation of this Plan.

An explanation of the land use categories identified in Table 1 on the previous page, their geographical locations, and their associated densities/intensities are explained below.

Residential Very Low Density: These are areas of WHC outside the planned 2020 water and sewer service area and are recommended to develop with densities commensurate with a rural setting. While the Plan articulates a maximum of 1 house for every three acres, the development in these areas may occur at much lower densities based on market demand for large estate lots or farmettes.

Residential Low Density: These are areas that are within the areas planned for public sewer and water and which are in locations that are somewhat removed from current population concentrations and centers. Maximum densities of one dwelling unit per acre are projected in these areas because of the availability of utilities and their more remote location from existing development and their adjacency to more rural areas.

Residential Infill: This broad category includes residential development at up to two dwelling units per acre and employment and service uses not to exceed 0.30 FAR (floor area ratio). These infill areas are those that are adjacent to areas that are currently developed and which are planned to be served by public water and sewer by 2020. This infill development land use category is meant to encourage contiguous development. The intensity of 0.30 FAR for the non-residential development and the residential development density of two dwelling units per acre provide a level of development compatible with existing development. It allows WHC to continue to grow and attract new residents and jobs while protecting other areas in a more rural development pattern. It is assumed that the residential development in this area will be predominantly single family with the split between single-family and multi-family units to be 75%-25% by the year 2020.

Residential Moderate Density: This land use is recommended in the Harrison City/Township area. It is based on the planned availability of public sewer and water service and the current trend of higher density housing that is occurring in this growing portion of WHC. The maximum of four dwelling units per acre allows for a wide range of housing types to be defined by the market and the preferences of the individual jurisdictions.

Employment: This classification seeks to identify the lands most suitable for employment development. They were selected based on a number of factors including their roadway accessibility, their adjacent development and the planned availability of public sewer and water. The recommended 0.30 FAR is commensurate with the levels of development that has been recently developing and is appropriate for newly developing suburban areas.

Employment Holding Areas: These are the areas that were identified through the planning process and which the individual jurisdictions identified as potential employment areas but are outside the areas planned for public sewer and water service. The intent of this category is to provide guidance

to the public decisionmakers and the private sector that these lands may be most appropriate for employment uses in the long-term future (post 2020). Interim uses that are appropriate may be quarries, nurseries, and low intensity employment uses not requiring public water and sewer and which can be redeveloped to more intensive uses in the future should water and sewer become available. While no specific intensity has been established, an FAR of 0.10 in the interim would be appropriate. The identification of these areas allows the decision to develop these areas in residential use, for example, to be made in a conscious manner with knowledge that such a decision would foreclose a future economic development opportunity.

It is recommended that an overlay zone be adopted to require review of sites within this classification. Since these areas are most predominantly located in Whitewater Township, it is recommended that zoning be adopted to allow full implementation of the intent of this classification and the long-term ability of WHC to sustain economic growth. However, growth will be controlled in these areas even without zoning or any additional regulation because they lack public sewer and water. It is recommended that public water and sewer not be provided in these areas within the planning horizon of this Plan. Thus, market forces will direct the more intensive development to other areas.

Projections

Projected 2020 population, households and jobs based on this Plan are shown in Table 2. Buildout – the year when all developable land is consumed – projections are also included. The employment buildout represents a substantial oversupply of employment. However, only a small fraction of these employment lands will actually develop. It is important to note that only a portion of the land planned for employment is in the area recommended for sewer and water service. Those areas represent the potential for a total of approximately 61,500 jobs (by 2020) as compared to the maximum potential buildout of 110,500 jobs (which assumes job growth in the Employment Holding Areas). The generous supply of employment lands will encourage the location of business in Western Hamilton County by strengthening competition, reducing land prices, and making Western Hamilton County more attractive for business formation.

Table 2: Projections Based on WHCCP

	1990¹	2020	Buildout
Households	51,000	73,000	90,600
Jobs	36,000	61,500	110,500
Population	141,000	196,000	241,000

¹Source 1990 U.S. Census.

Map 2 2020 Future Land Use Plan Preferred Scenario

Legend

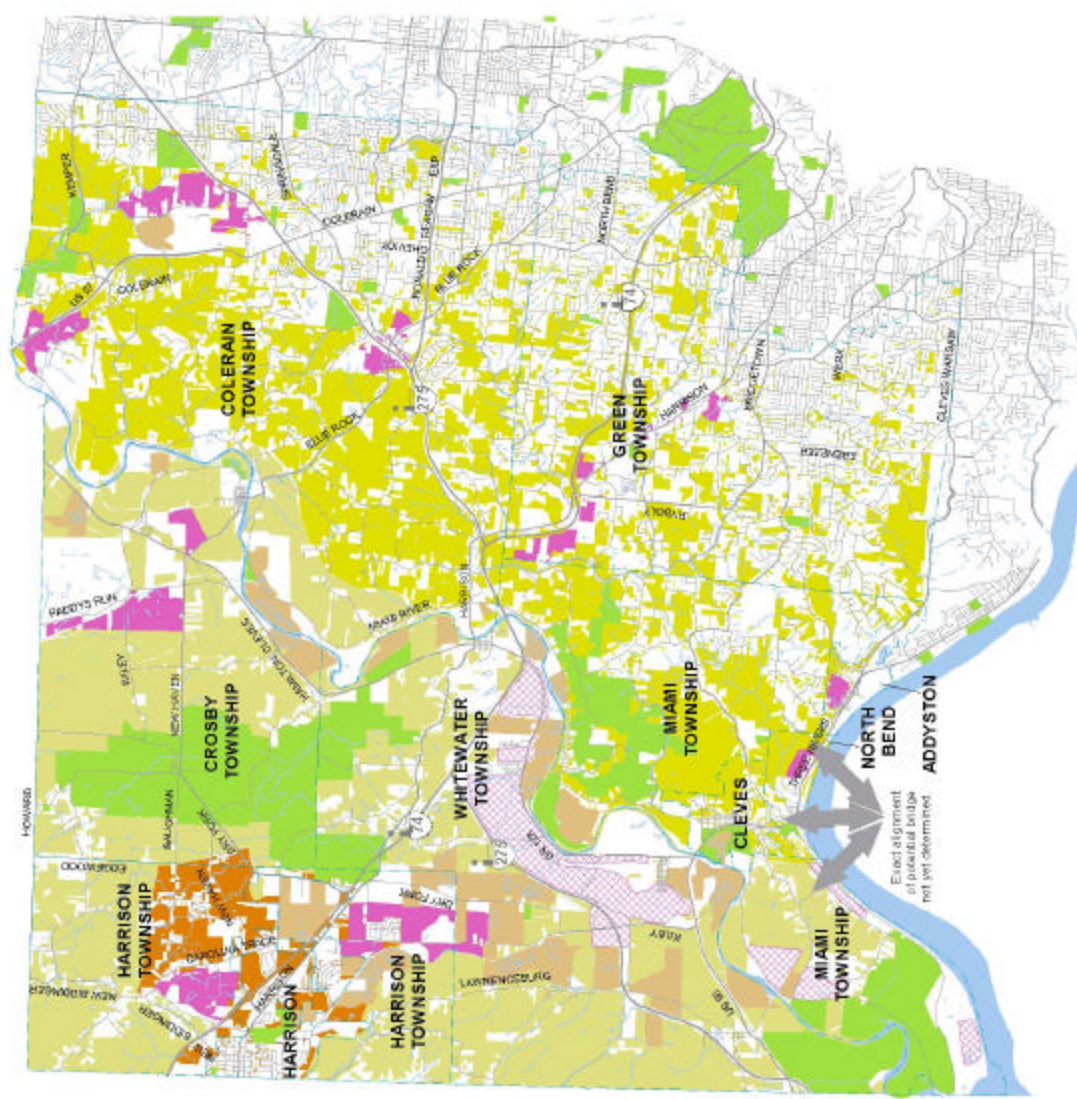
- Jurisdiction Boundary
- Freeways
- Arterials
- Streets
- Rivers/Streams
- Potential New Bridge
- Lands that are already developed
- Existing Park Lands
- Existing Mineral Extraction Areas
- Developable Lands
- Employment Holding Area
- Residential Very Low Density
(0.5 dwelling unit per acre)
- Developable Lands Within Planned
Sewer and Water Service Area
- Employment
(0.5 Floor Area Ratio)
- Residential Low Density
(1.0 dwelling unit per acre)
- Residential Infill Density
(2.0 dwelling unit per acre, 0.3 Floor Area Ratio)
- Residential Moderate Density
(4.0 dwelling unit per acre)

This map should be used in conjunction
with the text and other maps of the plan.
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Prepared by
LDR International Inc.

Data Chronometrics Inc.,
Community Analysis and Planning Systems
The Community Partnership
R.L.D. Zandw & Associates



THE PLAN'S BIG IDEAS AND PRIORITIES

The Plan is organized around five goals as follows:

- Work Together as a Region
- Balance Growth and Infrastructure
- Preserve Rural Character
- Protect Environmental Quality
- Achieve More Livable Communities

The Plan provides the basis for healthy growth and economic development with equal emphasis on preserving the west side's rural legacy. The Plan is based on a three-year effort to develop regional agreement on issues such as utility expansion, land use, transportation improvements, and environmental protection. Each of the Plan's goals is supported by a number of subgoals. A series of "key indicators of progress" serve as alternatives to measure achievement of the goals. The current indicators comprise an initial list of approaches, with additional indicators expected to be added through the ongoing process of this Plan as it is reviewed by various agencies and jurisdictions. It is anticipated that the indicators will then be ranked, and benchmarks will be generated to identify desired targets.

Some of the Plan's most important recommendations are highlighted below. These ideas and their associated policy initiatives are the key components of the Plan and are priority items that must be addressed for the Plan to come to fruition.

- ✓ **Phasing infrastructure** to support the future land use plan and vision **and promoting contiguous development.** The Plan initiatives focus on managing growth by only planning for public water and sewer to certain portions of the areas. These areas are generally contiguous to areas already developed at urban/suburban densities and which are currently served by public utilities. This policy will require a substantial change in the way infrastructure improvements are now implemented.
- ✓ **Promoting regional land use coordination** within Western Hamilton County. The Plan recommends that cooperation agreements be signed between the Western Hamilton County jurisdictions, Regional Planning Commission, and other stakeholder organizations to assist in implementing the action strategies of the WHCCP.
- ✓ **Pursuing roadway system upgrades** to accommodate residential growth and facilitate economic development as well as to avoid extensive and premature congestion. Much of the planned road improvements are intersection improvements to improve mobility.
- ✓ **Assessing the impact of a new Ohio River bridge crossing.** The Plan recommends that a study be conducted to examine the impacts of a bridge to provide clear guidance to regional decision-makers on the its benefits and issues.

- ✓ **Promoting job formation to balance housing growth, promote fiscal health, and reduce commuting pressures.** The west side has long lagged behind other areas in job development. The plan recommends that prime employment sites be identified and preserved to ensure that these economic development opportunities are not foreclosed.
- ✓ **Encouraging the local school districts to acquire needed school sites and “bank” them until needed.** As the area grows, there will be a need for additional public facilities including schools. The Plan recommends that the school districts proactively study growth patterns in this Plan to identify candidate school sites so they can be acquired in advance.
- ✓ **Promoting the preservation of local scenic roads.** The Plan recommends the establishment of a scenic roads program to identify and preserve these roads, minimize trees and vegetation removal along them, minimize grading, and minimize the number of road access points, where feasible.
- ✓ **Protecting the area’s drinking water supply.** The Plan recommends the establishment of a natural resource special interest public overlay district to protect the Buried Valley Acquirer to promote development practices and uses that reduce pollution sources.
- ✓ **Acquiring key environmentally sensitive areas.** The Plan recommends that acquisition should be accomplished through the development review process (via dedication), fee simple acquisition by individual jurisdictions or the County, or through use of a conservation easement program.
- ✓ **Promoting better community design.** The Plan promotes the idea of connectivity. It recommends that communities seek to include sidewalks in all residential areas with densities above one dwelling units per acre, locate public facilities such as schools, libraries and recreational facilities in a manner that enhances community character and provides a community focal point, and promote the location of new jobs in close proximity to planned housing concentrations. It also recommends that development codes be revised to allow for fewer cul-de-sacs and more connections in the road network as well as auto/pedestrian/bicycle connections between subdivisions and other designations.
- ✓ **Providing a variety of recreational and open space opportunities.** While Western Hamilton County has a wealth of regional park facilities, there are far fewer local and neighborhood facilities. The Plan recommends that parkland be acquired through the development review process or through outright purchase and seeks to have the vast majority of new homes within close proximity of active recreation.